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A.NOLEN

Assaulting Mt. Helicon: Writing and Current Affairs.

monthly archives: DECEMBER 2013

CONTROL, BABY!

Two parts to a killer post today: 1) Jacob Appelbaum fulfills his intelligence mission and 2) he is a harbinger of digital social disease (BadBIOS).

On with the show!

Jacob: “Look at that! It’s another American company that they [the NSA] are sabotaging.”

Well, If you follow @ioerror on Twitter you knew that this post was coming. My favorite spook, Jacob Appelbaum, gave a talk to 30C3 (that’s Chaos Computer Club) today called “To Protect and Infect, Part II”. His talk is the stage show complimenting *Der Spiegel’s* latest on the NSA and it’s Tailored Access Operations unit (TAO).

If you read my blog, you’ll know that I predicted Jacob’s next move would be to protect corporate intelligence assets at the expense of full-time NSA spooks. That’s exactly what happened at 30C3, *ad nauseam*.

Why does this matter? Because the really important part of Snowden’s revelations was that private corporate entities are working with the NSA/GCHQ to spy on you. Appelbaum’s strategy is to paint these mega-tech companies, the corporate sponsors who can afford tickets to his talks, as the victims of stupid/malicious government. Give ’em another chance, Joe Voter, so that we can salvage these invaluable, once-in-an-empire, intelligence assets. Watch the video. Appelbaum repeats the meme “It’s not the companies fault’ at least five times. I’m going to let him talk with a few quotes:

> *“This is part of a constant theme of [NSA] sabotaging and undermining American companies and American ingenuity. As an American, though generally not a nationalist, I find this disgusting, especially as someone who writes free software and would like my tax dollars to be spent on improving these things and when they do know about them [the vulnerabilities in Windows] I don’t want them to keep it a secret because all of us are vulnerable. It’s a really scary thing.”*

And, in case you forgot who the bad guys are…

> *“Emperor Alexander, the head of the NSA, has a lot of power. If they want to right now, they’ll know that the IMEI of this phone [holds up his iPhone] is interesting, it’s very warm, which is another, uh, funny thing, and they would be able to break into this phone almost certainly and then turn on the microphone. And all without the court. So that to me is really scary. And I especially dislike the fact that if you were to be building these types of things, they treat you as an opponent if you wish to be able to fulfill the promises that you make to your customers. And as someone who writes security software, I think that’s bullshit.”*

And tough-love, Tor-style…

> *“Now we’re going to name a bunch of companies, because fuck those guys for collaborating when they do. And fuck them for leaving us vulnerable when they do. And I mean that in the most loving way, because some of them are victims, actually. It’s important to note that we don’t yet*

> *understand which is which. So it's important to name them so that they have to go on record, so that they can say where they are, and so that they can give us enough rope to hang themselves. I really want that to happen, because I think it's important to find out who collaborated and who didn't collaborate. In order to have truth and reconciliation, we need to have a little truth."*

Jacob refuses to believe Apple is evil…

> *"Do you think Apple helped them [the NSA] with that [iPhone targets]? I don't know…. I don't really believe that Apple didn't help them with that."*
>
> *"Either they [the NSA] have a huge collection of exploits that work against Apple products, meaning that they are hoarding information about critical systems that American companies produce and sabotaging them, or Apple sabotaged it themselves. Not sure which one it is. I'd like to believe that since Apple didn't join the PRISM program until after Steve Jobs died, that maybe it's just that they write shitty software. We know* that's *true."*

Stop attacking Microsoft, NSA!

> *"How many people from Al Qeada use Solaris, do you suppose? This tells you a really important point. They [the NSA] are interested in compromising the infrastructure of systems, not just individual people, they want to take control and literally colonize those systems with these implants. And that's not part of the discussion. People are not talking about that because they don't know about that yet, but they should, because, in addition to the fact that Sun is a US company, which they are building capabilities against, that to me, it really bothers me, I can't tell you how much that bothers me. We also see that they are attacking Microsoft and other US companies, and Linux and Free USB (?) where there are a lot of people from all over the world who are building it, so they're attacking not only collective efforts and corporate efforts, but basically every option you possibly can, from end-users down to telecom core things, um…"*

Finally…

> *"I want to really harp on this. Now it's not that I think European companies are worth less, I suspect especially after this talk that won't be true, in the literal stock sense, but I don't know. I think it's really important to understand that they are sabotaging American companies because of the the so called 'home field advantage'.*
>
> *The problem is that as an American who writes software, who wants to build hardware devices, this really chills my expression and it also gives me a problem which is that people say: 'Why would I use what you're doing? What about the NSA?' Man that really bothers me! I don't deserve the Huawei taint. And the NSA gives it.*
>
> *President Obama's own advisory board, that was convened to understand the scope of these things has even agreed with me about this point. That this should not be taking place. That hording of zero-day exploits cannot happen simply without thought processes that are reasonable and rational and that have an social and economic valuing where we really think about the broad scale impact."*

So, yeah, Jacob's on a mission to save that special relationship between Silicon Valley and the US intelligence community.

Appelbaum's 30C3 talk had all the other attributes I've come to expect: 1) a shout-out to Laura, "My dear friend Laura Poitras who is totally fantastic, by the way"; 2) beating the 'they spied on Merkel!' drum and suggesting the NSA spied on another head of state, Hugo Chavez; 3) *not* outing Five-Eyes agents or targets, because some targets, Jacob feels, are "legitimate" (call off Louise Mensch!); 4) profiling hot-buttons like 'the NSA "crusades" against Muslims'; and 5) political misdirection, such as the following:

> *"You go to a URL, QUANTUMINSERT puts some code in your web-browser, which you then execute, which causes you to load resources, one of the resources that you'll load when you're loading CNN.com, for example, which is one of their examples. You like that by the way? That's an extremist site. So, you might have heard about that. A lot of Republicans in the United States read it, right before they wage illegal, imperialist wars."*

Oh, ho ho. CNN, Republicans and the NSA. Like the Republican president, Jacob?

I've marveled at Jacob's god-like knowledge of the NSA's operating capabilities and procedures for some time, but you knew that already. Thankfully, he puts it all in a nutshell for us:

> *"The NSA wants to be able to spy on you. If they have ten different options for spying on you that you know about, they have thirteen ways of doing it and they do all thirteen."*

I wanna know how Jacob writes his FOIA requests! So, seriously Jacob, what's the NSA's master plan?

> *"So that's the goal: total surveillance and non-attribution. And they want to do it in the dark."*

"Dark" like Tor? And there's the heart of the matter: Appelbaum is selling fear of the NSA. If I had a dollar for every time he used "scary" in this talk, I could buy a phone like his. He wants you to fear the NSA so that you'll use Tor with all those old Microsoft/Apple/Facebook products that you've come to know and love. Self-selecting with Tor is a cheap way for the

GLOBAL intelligence community to sort out who to watch– that's their big problem, sorting through everything they steal.

It's also interesting to note which companies Appelbaum chooses to protect and which ones he chooses to shame. Victims: Microsoft, Apache, Apple, Linux, Solaris… he even protects President Obama indirectly. Yahoo, however, must be behind on their payments:

> *"And boy oh boy do they [NSA-TAO] love Yahoo."*
>
> *"[35:40] You'll notice that right here they explain how QUANTUM works… They do an injection and try to beat the Yahoo packet back. Another interesting point is that for the Yahoo packet to be beaten, the NSA must impersonate Yahoo. This is a really important detail because what it tells us is that they are essentially conscripting Yahoo and saying that they are Yahoo. So they are impersonating Yahoo. [That's why half the chat functions don't work?!] So they are impersonating a US company to a US company user and they are not actually supposed to be in this conversation at all. And when they do it, then they, of course, basically, if you're using Yahoo you're definitely going to get owned. And I don't just mean that Yahoo is vulnerable, they are. But, I mean people who use Yahoo, maybe it's a bad generalization, but you know, they're not the most security minded people on the planet. They don't keep their computers up to date, I'm guessing. And that's probably why they love Yahoo so much. They also love CNN.com…"*

Cool kids don't use Yahoo.

On the other side of the spectrum: Jacob really likes Cryptophone, Redphone and Moxie Marlinspike. You know what that means– Moxie'll build the new spy-system to replace the old cell phone infrastructure which was outed for being a spy-system.

So Jacob enlightens us with this message: who should we love, who should we hate, what should we fear… and finally, how can we protect ourselves? Well, the Tor network and Tor's operating system Tails, naturally. On top of that, Appelbaum has told his followers that NSA-infection can be detected if your machine is emitting encrypted UDP traffic. Okay, that's what they want you to look for– by all means do! But I'd bet my eye-teeth there's more interesting stuff going on elsewhere.

Let me stop for breath…

Making that difficult phone call

The second intriguing thing about Appelbaum's 30C3 talk was how he tried to smooth over his quarrel with Dragos Ruiu, a brilliant computer security researcher who you can read about here. Dragos has been researching a fascinating computer virus(es) that appears to use speakers to bridge the air-gap; the virus is called "BadBios".

Before Appelbaum talked, I had never heard of said quarrel. But, in Appelbaum's own words:

> *"STUCCOMONTANA is 'BadBios' if you've heard about that. I feel bad for Dragos. He doesn't talk to me right now. I think he might be mad. After I was detained by the US Army on US soil, I might add, um, they took a phone from me. Now, it shouldn't matter but they did, now, they also went after all my phone records so they didn't need to take the phone, but they just wanted to intimidate me which is exactly the wrong thing to do to me, um, but, as he [Dragos] told the story, after that all of his computers including his X-box were compromised. And he says that even to this day that some of those things persist. And he talks about the Bios. Here is a document that shows clearly that they re-flash the Bios and they also have other techniques, including system management mode related root kits, and they have persistence inside of the Bios."*
>
> *"This is evidence of the thing that Dragos talks about– maybe he doesn't have it– but it really does exist."*

So, what you're saying Jacob, is that it wasn't you and it won't be you who does it again? Or are you giving the NSA credit for something that will scare the online community into a more perfect trap, a platinum age of computer surveillance? Totally heinous move, Jacob, but I'll admit, it's a clever tactic. How do I sign up for the Tor again? Does it support Yahoo?

LEAVE A COMMENT

TO MY DEAR READERS…

Greetings everyone!

I've enjoyed an uptick in readers lately and I appreciate your support and attention. I love writing; I really love being read. Sometimes I write about some freaky stuff.

So, out of respect for my legitimate readers, I feel it's my duty to inform you of the following:

Somebody was trying to count how many of you there were today.

I use the bog-standard WordPress platform. Sometimes I see that I have hits coming from websites offering services which can be used to watch how many people read my stuff. It's happened several times, but today it happened in a pretty egregious way. I got a hit from statcounter.com, read about what they do here. If you're short on time, here' s the pertinent quote:

1. *Sign up for the StatCounter service and we'll give you a tiny piece of HTML and Javascript code to insert into your webpage.*

2. *When a visitor visits your webpage with the installed HTML and Javascript code, their anonymous details are sent to StatCounter to be recorded. Their details are gathered either from the counter the visitor loads from StatCounter, or an invisible image depending on your settings. This action takes place instantaneously and the user is completely oblivious and unaffected by it. StatCounter has invested a great deal of time and money to ensure that this load time is instant. The load time experienced by your visitor is monitored daily and we are continually adding more dedicated servers as we grow to ensure instantaneous responses.*StatCounter.com respects your privacy, and the privacy of your visitors. View Privacy Policy

3. *The data we collect is then processed and analysed by us and stored in our database servers.*

4. *This is the fun bit! You can then log into your account anytime night or day to monitor and view your visitors and stats in real-time!*

FUN! I did not sign up for statcounter.com; so it's probable that somebody did this for me and is counting you. (Or tried to.) This hit happened along side a freakishly large number of hits to my site from India; including more than a few hits from search terms like "prakash narayan cia". Statcounter.com itself seems to be Aussie (see "our sponsors").

Now, I appreciate and respect my legitimate Indian readers. However, I don't have a lot of regular traffic from India and the country is known for outsourced tech work. I've drawn my own conclusions.

These counting-folks probably aren't terribly sophisticated, because I'm sure sophisticated players have a working relationship with WordPress already, and would just tick a box on a GUI rather than make a phone call.

I tell you this out of a feeling of responsibility; anolen.com has probably joined a very, very, very long list of teeny sites whose data is logged somewhere. Just so you know. Adds a certain spice, doesn't it? Happy reading!

3 COMMENTS

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Get the latest Flash Player
Learn more about upgrading to an HTML5 browser

Putin has drawn back the curtain and allowed Edward Snowden to make a Christmas message, seemingly in answer to the one made every year by Queen Elizabeth II (perhaps in parody of it, because her messages are usually quite empty).

Of course, this year's message from QE II was all about our fighters overseas,"pledges of service" and duty, which has a ghostly echo of the GCHQ and NSA shills' shrieks about Snowden 'putting hos before bros' and selling out his agency comrades. I hope that said shills will stop and pause for quiet reflection over the next year.

The embedded video is Snowden's message without obvious 'analysis' from the mainstream media, though the video has been edited and, worryingly, it appeared on Great Britain's Channel Four, which is about as establishment as you can get (it's one of the U.K.'s public channels). Note that government patronage doesn't *necessarily* make the channel anti-Putin when it's in Whitehall's interests to be friendly.

So did Cameron get good value for airtime?

I don't think so. Snowden used the minute-and-a-half to concisely restate the important issue at hand: government dragnet spying on innocent civilians through the technologies people buy from private companies. Slam dunk.

What's also important is what Snowden did not say. No 'thank you' to Julian, Laura, Glenn or Jacob. No reference to the stupid brouhaha over spying on heads of state or other powerful public figures. And for those who insist on painting Snowden as anti-American, note how he called out all governments/companies who engage in the abusive practices typified by the NSA and Google, Apple, Microsoft…

Snowden's reference to George Orwell's 1984 ought to go down a treat in Britannia; it should be a sore spot for them. If you'd like a little more thought in that vein, please have a look at my post Dystopian Sex II (it's one of my most popular!). Our children will be robbed of a lot of things, including privacy, if we don't do something about it.

Another media victory for the good guys, thank you Mr. Snowden! And a Merry Christmas to you, too.

LEAVE A COMMENT

THE LONG MARCH

"The jury's still out on that boy, Nick."

Putin may have done Edward Snowden a favor by locking him down in some nameless Moscow suburb. Half a year on from Snowden's revelations, even Glenn Greenwald appears to be loosing steam; he's certainly lost his sparkle after teaming with Pierre Omidyar. And of course, more than one NSA shill has burned out, flip-flopped or otherwise made a fool of themselves in a desperate attempt to save their ~~self-esteem~~ employer's reputation.

To those working damage control, the Snowden revelations are like a never-ending carnival ride, with white-knuckled media figures turning green in the face and just wanting off: "Can I retire to a life of well-paid do-goodery already?" Or perhaps, "I just want to get back to interrogating teenagers".

All this time, Snowden has been unable to comment freely because of the provisos attached to his temporary Russian asylum: he can't say anything to harm Putin's American buddies.

If the US intelligence community was more competent, this would have been a great hindrance to Snowden and Washington would owe Putin big-time. As it stands, those indulgent to US Intel were given **months** to repeatedly put their collective foot into their collective mouth, and Washington's best assets, Greenwald and Poitras, have sloppily outed themselves.

The people left looking best are, first and foremost, Edward Snowden, with Vladimir Putin at a distant second. Well done, Metroplex! Perhaps this is just Nature's way of saying, "It's time for a long, cold winter."

The latest thought for Americans to ponder: Snowden doubts the ability of Congress to implement any intelligence reforms, after the pathetic showing from the Secret Service Committee. Original German from Stern.

That means, fellow voters, that the safety valve is no longer working.

If you'd like to hear analysis of the President's *Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies* and its dubious 'recommendations', check out No Agenda's "Bios Brick" show 12/19/2013. "*Reading the report so you don't have to!* " You probably won't be surprised to hear Adam Curry's conclusions, because they're pretty much the same as Snowden's.

Merry Christmas! Let's hope for a few 'road to Damascus' conversions along the Beltline next year.

LEAVE A COMMENT

NECK

Henry Moore, Reclining Figure, 1951

It's been a while since I've written about Roald Dahl. My posts on him have been largely critical and I may, just may, have given the impression that I don't like him.

I *don't* like the guy, but I do like the author. I couldn't have written so much about him if I didn't, which is probably what wise people mean when they say 'love is close to hate'.

So this post is about what drew me to Dahl; it's an analysis of his short story *Neck*. What makes this particular story interesting is, like *Grammatisator* and ultimately *The Witches*, it shows that Dahl was able to see beyond the shallow-minded propaganda which he drank in gulps *most of the time*.

If you wonder what I mean by that, please read my posts on Dahl's knee-jerk anti-German prejudices, his patronage by Charles Marsh and FDR, his willingness to subvert democracy to save democracy… all the usual elitist double-think.

Sometimes, in the dead of night, when nobody important was looking, Roald Dahl crept down to his writing shed and toyed with the forbidden knowledge of conspiracy, ethnicity, the supernatural… all things that an enlightened man of the 20th century knows don't exist. Roald Dahl is the archetypical storm-trooper who yearns to join the resistance; a slave stealing peeks at freedom.

So, on to *Neck*!

Sir Basil Turton, a rich publishers' heir on the verge of middle-age, comes into his fortune. He's a reluctant newspaperman (yes, that's right!) with the power to topple the British government. Still single, this malleable bachelor is suddenly the most eligible man in London, and every young lady has their claws out. Basil is totally helpless, having spent most of his life in quiet country living and bookish pursuits.

Then, out of the blue a foreigner snares him; he's married in a trice. His foreign wife 'cheats' with this hasty marriage, because she snags him in August, when every well-bred contender is on vacation.

> *You can imagine that the London ladies were indignant, and naturally they started disseminating a vast amount of fruity gossip about the new Lady Turton ("That dirty poacher," they called her).*

I side with the English Roses. Dahl does too. When I first read this story, I wasn't expecting Dahl to agree with me: I've gotten used to 'right-think' in everything and, clearly, the marriage market should be global. Roald's breaking step was refreshing and suddenly the story got interesting– for me anyway.

So, the new Lady Turton is a foreigner, but what type of foreigner? No one really knows, and in that at least, Dahl seems to have taken a page out of Bulgakov's book. You'll remember that in Bulgakov's writing, spies and the devil Woland are often of nebulous, 'foreign' origins. This is how Dahl puts it:

> *… what made her [Lady Turton's] case unusual was the fact that she was a foreigner and that nobody seemed to know precisely what country she came from, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria or Russia?*

Could Dahl be drawing on his wartime espionage experience through the character of Lady Turton? Is he commenting on the spook-talent-pool? Could he and Bulgakov have noticed something similar? *Neck* was first published in 1953 by– you guessed it– Alfred Knopf, the famous New York publishing magnate who Dahl lampooned in *Grammatisator*. It's possible that an English version of *The Fatal Eggs* made it into Dahl's hands, though *Master and Margarita* wasn't published in Russian until 1967. It's likely, therefore, that these men drew their own conclusions separately.

Dahl liked to focus on noses and mouths to convey aspects of character. His description of the new Lady Turton is masterful and typical in this respect:

> *The nostrils for example were very odd, somehow more open, more flaring than any I had seen before, and excessively arched. This gave the whole nose a kind of open, snorting look that had something of the wild animal about it- the mustang.*

Art is the running theme through this story; art describes Basil's life and the the woman he married is artful. It's fitting that glamorous Lady Turton be compared to a painting:

> *The hair was black, and to go with it she had one of those pale, oval, innocent fifteenth-century Flemish faces, almost exactly a Madonna by Memling or Van Eyck. At least that was the first impression. Later, when my turn came to shake hands, I got a closer look and saw that except for the outline and colouring it wasn't really a Madonna at all– far, far from it.*

Continuing…

> *And the eyes, when I saw them close, were not wide and round the way the Madonna painters used to make them, but long and half closed, half smiling, half sullen, and slightly vulgar, so that in one way or another they gave her a most delicately dissipated air. What's more, they didn't look at you directly. They came to you slowly from over on one side with a curious sliding motion that made me nervous. I tried to see their colour, thought it was pale grey, but couldn't be sure.*

And her deportment…

> *She was clearly conscious of her success and of the way these Londoners were deferring to her. "Here I am, " she seemed to be saying, "and I only came over a few years ago, but already I am richer and more powerful than any of you." There was a little prance of triumph in her walk.*

The new Lady Turton is a thoroughly nasty character, and she makes Sir Basil's life equally nasty by treating him with contempt and parading lovers in front of him. She takes over the publishing business, naturally.

How do we, the readers, know all of this? The narrator, a thinly veiled version of Dahl himself, is a gossip columnist who wheedles an invitation to Sir Basil's home from the Lady. This set-up is a variation on the 'dinner guest' theme that Dahl used for *Taste*, and many of the same observations apply.

The narrator knows as soon as he steps inside Sir Basil's home that something is off. The butler likes to gamble and sell information about his mistress. Sir Basil's modern art looks out of place in the English Renaissance stone mansion. Sir Basil himself is surrounded by his wife, her lover and her stocky, lesbian friend Carmen La Rosa. The Lady greets the narrator with a threat, and 'Dahl' feels instant comradery with the long-suffering Sir Basil.

I'll cut to the chase. Sir Basil gets back at his wife, in a fashion. He achieves this through his art collection, so more on that now.

There are three modern artists who get the spotlight in this story: Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. It's Epstein's work in particular that looks out of place in Sir Basil's country pile. The narrator mentions Gaudier-Brzeska just as Sir Basil notices his Lady making love to somebody else in the garden (she reveals her true nature). The lady gets her head stuck in a Henry Moore while kissing her lover. Sir Basil fetches an axe– to break the statue or to chop off her head?

I see interesting symbolism here. Gaudier Brzeska was a hugely influential sculptor and part of the Vorticist movement, made famous by Ezra Pound in his treatise on the artist. Gaudier Brzeska's death in WWI is what Pound says lead him to ask the political questions which eventually got the poet accused of treason after WWII. That aside, Gaudier Brzeska's art sought to strip away the artful and expose true form. It's beautiful work; it unmasks the unfaithful lady.

Jacob Epstein was an Jewish-American transplant to the U.K., who was also associated with the Vorticist movement, but who found some success and patronage amongst the class of people 'Sir Basil' belonged to. He is particularly famous for his bust of controversial figure Paul Robeson. Epstein's artwork is out-of-place on an English country estate, yet Sir Basil is surrounded by it.

Henry Moore is the most famous of the three and held socialist views. 'Socialism' is a term almost as abused as 'fascism'; but for Moore that meant selling his art at a discount so that the less fortunate could enjoy it. (He could easily afford to!) Moore's generous acts have not always elicited a generous response from those he would enlighten, however, he was the son of a coal-miner and I believe that he probably did have genuine love for the lower classes. Lady Tuton gets herself stuck playing with his work, which is easy for any rich socialist to do!

Sadly, Sir Basil destroys the Moore rather than his wife, but he does win a small victory in doing so. I'm left thinking that his wife will be slightly tamer in the future, now that she's been *named*.

Neck uses the same tricks that I've come to expect from a Dahl adult-short: lots of direct conversation, gossipy tone, all the go-to imagery. However, *Neck* was the first time I saw dissension by Dahl in a grown-up story. FDR, Intrepid and Charles Marsh would not be amused.

7 COMMENTS

NELSON MANDELA AND MTV

Check out John Dvorak and Adam Curry's awesome show on Nelson Mandela and his promotion through MTV in 1988. "Creating the Nelson Mandela Image." "Using Music as an Agent for Change."

No Agenda Show for Sunday December 8th: Uptalking Dudes

Get the show from the No Agenda Archives.

I guess nobody knew who Mandela was until a well-spoken Brit decided to promote Nelson as the face of the ANC. The choice of Mandela is doubly odd because there were more popular ANC figureheads at the time. Until the MTV blitzkrieg Mandela was considered a terrorist. You can learn a lot as a Veejay. *Who knew.*

LEAVE A COMMENT

MY FRIEND FROM WOW…

Fedtrolls! I'm kidding. They'd choose an avatar with big breasts.

We now know that the NSA/GCHQ use online gaming forums "to recruit potential informants among the gamers". There are so many NSA staffers gaming-on-the-job, that the agency had to set up a "*"de-confliction"* group" to make sure that one op didn't interfere with the next.

I'm left asking 'Why?'.

Apparently, gaming communities are "target-rich" places, where terrorists recruit and "hide in plain sight".

According to *Russia Today*,

> *They [online gaming communities] could be used to build pictures of the players' social networks, obtain their photos and geographical locations, as well as gather their communications. The games were also a convenient window for hacking attacks, the report said.*

The NSA believes this but is, of course, unwilling or unable to provide evidence that terrorists are using these networks.

So who are they really watching?

From my personal experience, gamers are (usually!) fairly smart people who game as an escape from their day-to-day lives. They work hard, pay their taxes, then crash in front of a computer; or they're college-grads who couldn't find a job; or high school kids who can't find work or hang out outside because the neighborhood is dangerous. (I.E. the rest of their classmates are in gangs.)

Most gamers are not the guys who feel comfortable, for example, getting drunk then laid in a bar's parking lot; they're not comfortable with the type of behavior which seems– if I'm using my television correctly– to be the highest expression of American life. They want something different.

Many gamers are people who are clever and have reason to be dissatisfied with the system. They're probably more white, male, educated, middle-class than the population at large, though Middle-Eastern and Asian dudes would be the next largest group.

In short, gamers are (by and large) at the top of a growing list of people who are 'mainstream' outcasts. They are people who it's not popular to be and while, in my experience, they don't message each other things like 'Let's bomb Cleveland', they may message something like 'Obama Sucks' or 'I wouldn't fight for that', which is the *really* scary thing for America's elite.

Fedtrolls in the *World of Warcraft*? That's just Feinstein saying: 'I love you.'

LEAVE A COMMENT

GRAND THEFT AUTONOMY

The face that launched a thousand careers.

When I was a young analyst, nearly a decade ago now, I sat next to a really smart kid at work. We shared open cubicles and I had a good view of his screen from my desk. One day I saw he was playing a video game.

"Whatcha doing?" I asked. I wanted to play too.

"This is a beta version of a game I've been asked to try out."

"At work?"

"Yeah, (his boss) gave it to me."

"Cool. What type is it?"

"A training game."

The premise of the game was to engineer a *coup d'etat* using 'soft power' techniques: recruiting radicals, disseminating propaganda, courting media. You could engineer your own 'color revolution' from a digital console. I couldn't play long, because George Soros was giving a talk downstairs that afternoon and somebody had to set out the coffee cups.

The game didn't make it into production, possibly because of the inflammatory nature of the premise. You don't have to be a genius to know that there's a fine line between virtual training and cynical mockery. The game never had a name, but I'll call it *Grand Theft Autonomy*.

Memories of *Grand Theft Autonomy* came flooding back to me today when I read about the incredible Srdja Popovic, well known for his Washington-approved political activism during the War in Yugoslavia. (The war that launched Jeremy Scahill's career.) Here's the article from Occupy.com:

Exposed: Globally Renowned Activist Collaborated With Intelligence Firm Stratfor

> *Serbia's Srdja Popovic is known by many as a leading architect of regime changes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere since the late-1990s, and as one of the co-founders of Otpor!, the U.S.-funded Serbian activist group which overthrew Slobodan Milošević in 2000.*

Srdja used his cache as a 'respected' political activist to get in touch with other activists around the world, then sell their information to Stratfor. (Good business, if you can get it!)

> *Using his celebrated activist status, Popovic opened many doors for Stratfor to meet with activists globally. In turn, the information Stratfor intended to gain from Popovic's contacts would serve as "actionable intelligence"—the firm billed itself as a "Shadow CIA"—for its corporate clients.*

> *Popovic passed information to Stratfor about on-the-ground activist events in countries around the world, ranging from the Philippines,Libya, Tunisia, Vietnam, Iran, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Tibet, Zimbabwe, Poland and Belarus, Georgia, Bahrain, Venezuela and Malaysia. Often, the emails reveal, Popovic passed on the information to Stratfor without the consent of the activists and likely without the activists ever knowing that their emails were being shuttled to the private security firm.*

And…

> *Stratfor saw Popovic's main value not only as a source for intelligence on global revolutionary and activist movements, but also as someone who, if needed, could help overthrow leaders of countries hostile to U.S. geopolitical and financial interests. So useful was Popovic to Stratfor that the firm gave him a free subscription, dubbed "legit sources we use all the time as a company" by Papic.*
>
> *In a June 2011 email, Papic referred to Popovic as a "great friend" of his and described him as a "Serb activist who travels the world fomenting revolution."*
>
> *"They…basically go around the world trying to topple dictators and autocratic governments (ones that U.S. does not like ," Papic says in one email. Replying to a follow up to that email, he states, "They just go and set up shop in a country and try to bring the government down. When used properly, more powerful than an aircraft carrier battle group."*

And…

> *"In fact between 1997 and 2000 the National Endowment for Democracy and US government may have accomplished what NATO's 37,000 bombing sorties had been unable to do: oust Milosevic, replace him with their favoured candidate Vojislav Kostunica and promote a neoliberal vision for Serbia," independent scholar Michael Barker wrote for Z Magazine. "In much the same way as corporate front groups and astroturf groups recruit genuinely committed supporters,*

> *strategically useful social movements can potentially dominate civil society when provided with the right resources (massive financial and professional backing).”*

Finally…

> *“We trained them in how to set up an organization, how to open local chapters, how to create a ‘brand,’ how to create a logo, symbols, and key messages,” an Otpor! activist told U.S.-funded media outlet Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty. “We trained them in how to identify the key weaknesses in society and what people’s most pressing problems were—what might be a motivating factor for people, and above all young people, to go to the ballot box and in this way shape their own destiny.”*

Read the whole article here, plenty of juicy details and well worth your time. (Thank you Carl Gibson and Steve Horn.) As you can see, even a decade ago, these ‘revolutions’ were pretty formulaic. In fact, they aren’t really ‘revolutions’ at all, but as the article states, “intra-elite power transfers”.

So, what most people have suspected all along is true. US Government agents infiltrate and manipulate civil unrest around the world to their own ends. Leveraging technology is a big part of this effort, which puts Jesselyn Radack’s tweet this afternoon in a whole new light:

> *@arusbridger Asked abt @torproject. Tries to answer & MP won't let him b/c "you've already revealed enough." cc: @ioerror #SecurityTheater*
>
> *— unRADAGKted (@JesselynRadack) December 3, 2013*

For those of you who don’t know, @ioerror is Jacob Appelbaum, and today the UK parliament grilled Alan Rusbridger, the editor-in-chief of *The Guardian*, about publishing Snowden’s leaks. I guess that the MP knows something about The Tor Project that the rest of us don’t?! #footinmouth

Take home: we can all look forward to Srdja Popovic’s regular contributions to Pierre Omidyar’s news network.

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